

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 ACDA-07 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07 FEAE-00 INT-05 OES-06

DLOS-04 SAL-01 /112 W

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R 121107Z MAY 76

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2731

INFO AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 3392

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, ENRG, LY, TS

SUBJ: TUNISIA/LIBYA OFF-SHORE BOUNDARY: REQUEST FOR
DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT

REF : TUNIS 3163, TUNIS 3373

1. ON-GOING PETROLEUM EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES ON THE
CONTINENTAL SHELF IN THE GULF OF GABES AND THE DISCOVERY
OF COMMERCIALY EXPLOITABLE PETROLEUM DEPOSITS THERE
HAVE GIVEN NEW ECONOMIC AND MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE TO THE
TUNISIAN/LIBYAN CONFLICT OVER DELINEATION OF THE OFFSHORE
BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THIS CONFLICT HAS
MOST RECENTLY BEEN MANIFESTED IN THE TWO COUNTRIES'
PLACEMENT OF MAKER BUOYS IN THE DISPUTED ZONE IN A MANNER
REFLECTING CONFLICTING CLAIMS.

2. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY FRENCH EMBASSY HERE AND BY TUNISIAN
NATIONAL PETROLEUM COMPANY (ETAP) THAT SEPARATE STUDIES
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HAVE BEEN MADE THAT REACH CONFLICTING CONCLUSIONS OVER

LOCATION OF BOUNDARY UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW, IN MOST PROMISING AREAS FOR PETROLEUM EXPLOITATION. FRENCH EMBASSY OFFICER CLAIMS THAT FRENCH STUDY CLEARLY PUTS ENTIRE REGION UNDER LIBYAN JURISDICTION. ETAP CLAIMS THAT A STUDY CONDUCTED BY AN UNSPECIFIED BRITISH GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY ASSIGNS REGION TO TUNISIA.

3. CONTINENTAL SHELF DISPUTE, WHICH HAS BEEN CITED BY GOT OFFICIALS IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS AS THE MOST IMPORTANT OUTSTANDING BILATERAL PROBLEM BETWEEN TUNISIA AND LIBYA, HOLDS THE POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS CONFRONTATION. AS NOTED IN OUR REPORTING, TUNISIA HAS WARNED LARG ABOUT ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF TUNISIAN SOVEREIGNTY IN REGION IN STERNLY WORDED DIPLOMATIC NOTES, WHILE WE HAVE ALSO REPORTED OTHER ACTIONS WHICH COULD LEAD TO OPEN CONFLICT. SCENARIO COULD INCLUDE ATTEMPTS BY EITHER PARTY TO CUT MARKER BUOYS LAID BY THE OTHER, OR EFFORTS BY ONE SIDE TO DISRUPT SURVEY OF DRILLING OPERATIONS BY CONTRACTORS FOR THE OTHER.

4. ACTION REQUESTED: EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S UNDERTAKING STUDY OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON WHAT CLAIMS GOT AND LARG ARE ADVANCING, WITH RESPECT TO LOCATION OF EXCLUSIVE EXPLOITATION AREAS ON CONTINENTAL SHELF AND BEYOND, AND WITH RESPECT TO TERRITORIAL WATERS. RISK OF INCIDENT IN GULF OF GABES AREA STRIKES EMBASSY AS SUFFICIENTLY HIGH TO WARRANT PRIORITY STUDY. EMBASSY WOULD ALSO APPRECIATE, IF AVAILABLE, FOR ITS INFORMATION ONLY, AN ASSESSMENT OF VALIDITY OF COMPETING CLAIMS IN INTERNATIONAL LAW.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CONTINENTAL SHELF, TERRITORIAL WATERS, BOUNDARY DETERMINATION, OFFSHORE OIL FIELDS, EXPLORATORY DRILLING
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 MAY 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: vogelfj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976TUNIS03392
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760183-0405
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760561/aaaacaah.tel
Line Count: 90
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 TUNIS 3163, 76 TUNIS 3373
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: vogelfj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 26 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <26 APR 2004 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <16 AUG 2004 by vogelfj>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TUNISIA/LIBYA OFF-SHORE BOUNDARY: REQUEST FOR DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT
TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, ENRG, LY, TS
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006